

EMPATHY AND THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR OF 1958 IN THE USA

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Abstract: This article examines the role that empathy played during the US intervention in the Lebanese civil war of 1958, also known as Operation Blue Bat. Through deep readings of public texts, it explores how a minority of Americans empathized with Lebanese opponents of President Camille Chamoun. After the arrival of US forces, Lebanese anti-Chamounists made their voices heard and feeling felt in the USA via global information providers, enacting cultural interventions. Lebanese dissent was headline news, engendering empathetic processes that reoriented US ways of feeling, thinking, and acting. By using empathy as a point of entry into historical intercultural relations, this article unearths how genuine transnational understandings were socially formed during a moment of conflict. Ultimately, it argues that a focus on empathy gives foreign relations scholars an avenue *that* eschews nefarious Orientalist binaries and their powers in the process.

Keywords: empathy, Arab–US relations, Lebanon, emotions, communications, transnationalism

The summer of 1958 was a tense time for Arab–US relations in the Middle East. Amid a tumultuous round of unions, revolutions, and conspiracies, the USA conducted its first open military intervention in the region, plunging itself into a 2-month long civil war in Lebanon. Responding to a desperate appeal from Lebanese president Camille Chamoun, US president Dwight Eisenhower ordered what would amount to roughly 14,000 US forces to intervene in the land of cedars. Surprised, Lebanese people conveyed a gamut of mixed emotions—either directly or indirectly—to Americans.

Eid Dib, a Christian Maronite from Lebanon studying in the USA, was one of these people. In a letter to the *National Guardian*, Dib asked Americans to open their doors to Lebanese perspectives and emotions when contemplating Operation Blue Bat, the official name of Washington’s 1958 operation in Lebanon. “As a young man who admires the greatness of the United States,” the Lebanese student appealed to Americans “not to let what is happening in the Middle East and

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recently in Lebanon to be undertaken in your name.” A profound desire for “liberation from Western foreign domination” was at the heart—and in the hearts—of Lebanese imaginations. “We Arab people, having suffered under English and French colonialism, cannot be blamed for resenting American interference, particularly when this country invites our former oppressors to ‘settle the Middle East problems.’” The Lebanese civil war of 1958, as many Lebanese like Dib saw it, was a postcolonial chapter in Lebanon’s ongoing process of decolonization.¹ Eisenhower’s unpopular choice to deploy US boots to intervene in the internal affairs of another sovereign nation-state went against Lebanese popular will.² It gave Lebanese society the impression that the USA was amid an imperial turn in the Middle East.

Just as US marines dug into the sand at Khalde Beach, Lebanon’s anti-Chamounist opposition made its voices heard and feelings felt, both at home and abroad. Dib’s *cri de coeur*, and myriad others like it, touched varying parts of US society, opening empathetic pathways that effected and affected transnational dissent vis-à-vis Washington’s military intervention and its perceived irrational support for the imperious Lebanese head of state. The situational flow of distressed Lebanese voices into the US public sphere and the ensuing “transmission of affect,” from the Lebanese to Americans, further nuanced US public discussions regarding the USA in Lebanon, the Middle East, and the world in ways that contributed to bringing Operation Blue Bat to a screeching halt.³

The emotion of empathy permitted a decentered group of willing and able Americans to put on a Third World lens—in this case, a Lebanese one—when viewing a purported Cold War conflict, failures and deceptions notwithstanding.⁴ During the summer of 1958, it became easier for reactive Americans to feel what Lebanese felt, (re)orienting sensitivities, prejudices, positions, decisions, actions, and communications regarding Operation Blue Bat.⁵ The views from Beirut and elsewhere in Lebanon, the emotions that undergirded them, as well as the emotional processes that they begat broke down walls of “affective self-containment” in the USA between Americans and Lebanese, connecting distant “emotional repertoires.”⁶

By focusing on how an ambiguous lot of Americans empathized with Lebanese anti-Chamounists during the US intervention in 1958, this article tells the story of an overshadowed dimension and chapter within affective relations between Arabs and Americans. More specifically, it unveils how empathy and its variant emotional processes (in)formed a curious relationship during a time of crisis. Why both sides connected can be easily discerned: they opposed Operation Blue Bat. But how?

This article demonstrates how empathy served as an important conduit in the formation of transnational dissent during the US intervention in the Lebanese civil war of 1958. Operation Blue Bat not only brought US military and Lebanese

civilian bodies to their closest contact point in contemporary historical memory; it also opened up a temporary space that facilitated an emotional rapprochement between non-Arab Americans located in disparate parts of the continental USA and Lebanese people, geographically separated by half the globe.⁷ The emotion of empathy emerged from this temporal window, open only for roughly a month or so—that is, between the US’ decision to intervene in and then withdraw from Lebanon—as a unifying force in a conflict that, for the most part, pitted one national majority against another: most Lebanese opposed the US intervention, whereas most Americans stood behind their experienced Commander-in-Chief.⁸

Empathy, like emotions more generally, has long baffled specialists and the public alike. Humanists, neurobiologists, and social scientists often differ on its particulars, but concur about empathy’s core meaning. Empathy is both a personal and collective process enmeshed in a spontaneous cocktail of emotion and cognition, whereby thinking and feeling are firmly intertwined. Often explained by the metaphors of standing in someone else’s shoes or looking through someone else’s eyes, empathy is initiated by a will to be heard. A first person’s “perspective-giving” is then followed by a second person’s act of listening and, if successful, “perspective-taking.” A hormonal dose of oxytocin is sent to an amygdala in the latter’s brain, activating mirror neurons. The recipient’s reflections then lead to: reducing prejudices, feeling *for* and *with* others, obtaining a greater understanding of the others’ situations, integrating those foreign understandings within one’s thoughts and civil actions, as well as forming a common cause.⁹

Empathy, at its best, weakens tensions, enabling an embracing communion of emotions both *within* one’s body and *between* bodies, regardless of respective locations in the world and imagined cultural differences.¹⁰ Given the difficulties with reading historical emotions, critically tracing processes by which someone adopted another person’s perspective serves as a strong archive of empathy in action. Whereas empathy can and has been the subject of duplicitous manipulation,¹¹ its authenticity can be discerned by paying close attention to the ways in which empathy was present. As Nicole Eustace explains, “Understanding the contributions of emotion to political change requires taking into account a wide range of elements—ideas *and* actions, abstract rhetoric *and* concrete expressions.”¹² By following its trails, empathy’s situational abuse or misuse can be more easily identified.

Empathy’s evidence, like all emotions, lies in the deep reading of texts, other cultural productions, and the narratives they carry.¹³ Thus far, foreign relations scholars have directed their magnifying glasses mainly on an elite person’s private materials, notably personal diaries, tapes, pictures, and papers, resulting in path-breaking analyses of either an interpretation of a specific emotion or the ways in which individual feeling impacted thinking and action.¹⁴ Such biographical focus, however, entraps itself in private/public and individual/collective dichotomies, as

it carries a long-standing psychological assumption that the inner ultimately shapes the outer, also known as the inside-out model. This individual-centered framework downplays society's influence on the formations of individual/collective emotions.¹⁵ When it comes to global affairs, it also downplays how the foreign changes the domestic.

Emotional processes are located within one of society's most accessible archives: the media.¹⁶ Reading a newspaper incited individual emotions. Ensuing empathetic processes motivated individuals to partake in publicly mediated conversations. Empathy, through deep readings of emotives and their travels, was both in texts and engendered narratives. US newspapers, alongside Lebanese ones and Arab-run, Arabic-to-English global information providers, like the Arab News Agency and its daily information digest *Mideast Mirror*, represented a key transnational space that enabled the "circulation of affect."¹⁷ This emotionally initiated, Lebanese/US "network of information" occupied language, expressions, metaphors, events, images, and opinions that embodied empathetic processes in the making.¹⁸ US internalizations and ensuing social formations with Lebanese, in this case, can be found within the combined, circulating presence of opposing Lebanese perspectives in the US public sphere, US reproductions of Lebanese anti-Chamounists points of view, situational US paraphrasing, as well as US uses of empathy metaphors when conversing about US–Middle East relations.

Contemporary foreign relations scholars, focused on the Arab world, the USA, and elsewhere, commonly read with empathy, not *for* empathy. Now more than ever, Arab agents, perspectives, and contexts rightly rest at the center of Arab–US relations scholarship.¹⁹ Yet the empathetic processes that powered emotive migrations, ideational transformations, and transnational connections remain a blind spot. Ironically, in the case of Arab–US relations, this is perhaps best explained by the fact that USA's (mis)understandings of Arab states, societies, peoples, economies, cultures, and points of view have historically been emotionally charged, in a negative sense. Worldly imperial traditions, which Edward Said famously outlined, explained, and critiqued in his 1978 canon *Orientalism*, overwhelmingly hindered affective relations, stressing divisions over relationality. Discriminatory ideas of "emotionalism," "anti-Americanism," "irrationality," and "hatred" served—and continue to serve—as discursive means to dehumanize Arabs in US imaginations and distance the Arab world from the USA.²⁰ The scientific quest to master "the Arab mind" after 1945 omitted oxytocin and mirror neurons, leaving Arab and US hearts in the cold.²¹ Post-9/11 attempts to know "the Arab street" followed similar Orientalist footsteps.²² A more than skin-deep historical understanding of *how* Americans empathized with Lebanese during the civil war of 1958, therefore, contributes to the re-orientation of knowledge regarding Arab–US relations, past, present, and future.

The Lebanese Civil War of 1958

The Lebanese civil war of 1958 began during the early hours of May 8, 1958. Word rapidly spread concerning the assassination of Nassib Matni, a Maronite Christian critic of Chamoun. Having just penned yet another op-ed that demanded the immediate resignation of the Lebanese president and his government, the 57-year-old owner of the influential Beirut daily *Telegraf* returned home at dusk to a panoply of bullets, fired by concealed assailants. He was the third opposition-affiliated Lebanese journalist murdered in recent months. Upon the shocking discovery of his cadaver, all signs pointed toward Chamoun and his followers. Matni's pockets, as Arab press reports explained, bore four unsigned letters that issued death threats to the Lebanese publisher if he failed to relent his barrage vis-à-vis the Grand Sérail, the Lebanese government palace.²³

Lebanese emotions boiled over in the wake of Matni's martyrdom. The National Front, a loose coalition of anti-Chamounist factions formed in April 1957 and led by the likes of Sa'ib Salam, Kemal Jumblatt, Rashid Karame, and 'Abdallah Yafi, amid others, called for a nation-wide general strike to protest Chamoun's authoritarianism. Chamoun, Lebanese opposition leaders claimed as early as 1955, positioned Lebanon against the tides of Arab decolonization, to the detriment of Lebanese nationalism and sovereignty. The Lebanese president contravened the National Pact of 1943, which unofficially outlined Lebanon's status as an independent nation-state, affirmed the primacy of its Arab identity, and rejected the maxim of Western intervention. Chamoun's unilateral decisions to not denounce the Baghdad Pact of 1955, to not officially sever ties with France and Britain during the Suez Crisis of 1956–57, and to issue a wholesale endorsement of the Eisenhower Doctrine in January 1957 that sanctioned US intervention in the Middle East if and when requested by a local government, failed to keep Western powers at bay; rather, to the grave consternation of many Lebanese, it brushed off the welcome mat and laid it down for the world to see.²⁴

Chamoun rejected all blame for starting the Lebanese crisis and stubbornly refused to publicly deny any desire of extending his presidential mandate. A few days after Lebanon's "mini civil war" began,²⁵ his foreign minister, Charles Malik, proclaimed that Egyptian *raïs* Gamal Abdel Nasser's United Arab Republic (UAR) wrongfully intervened in Lebanese affairs and disrupted national unity by arming so-called rebels. The Chamoun regime then formally presented a complaint of UAR interference before both the League of Arab States and the United Nations (UN) Security Council. Chamoun's presidential authority and the international community's ignorance led many at the UN and beyond to sympathize with his government, engendering the creation of the UN Observation Group on Lebanon (UNOGIL) to investigate charges of UAR meddling.²⁶

The Chamounist perspective that the Lebanese civil war of 1958 was a product of external interference, not internal conflict, served as a central mechanism to contain the National Front. While fearing the power of Nasser's pan-Arabism in the wake of Egypt's recent union with neighboring Syria, Chamoun did not want opposing Lebanese points of view to travel beyond the land of cedars, or the Arab world. His internationalization of the crisis had the effect of silencing and de-legitimizing the National Front at home and in the world. Chamoun, at home, targeted the Lebanese press—the only “free press” in the Middle East—and its editorialists.²⁷ By the end of May 1958, his regime appropriated seven Beirut-based newspapers for “publishing unauthorized military information.” Lebanese anti-Chamounist dailies, including the leading and nationally respected *An-Nahar*, *Beirut*, *Beirut al-Massa*, and Matni's *Telegraf*, were referred to a military court. An ashamed Farid Kozma, the Lebanese Minister of Information, subsequently resigned in protest. Chamoun's Council of Ministers instituted heavy state censorship, which mainly targeted anti-Chamounist forums.

Bit by bit, incited by both local situations as well as the Egyptian *Sawt al-Arab*'s call for regime change in Lebanon, the National Front enacted “representational interventions” to legitimize its cause in the eyes of the world.²⁸ Global English-language information providers, like the Associated Press (AP), the newly formed United Press International (UPI), Reuters, and Howard Scripps, expanded their offices in Beirut, multiplied their staffs in response to international demands, and tip-toed around the Chamounist news ban. Unaware of exactly if, how, and when they would be heard and felt, anti-Chamounist leaders gave their perspectives to foreign correspondents and their fixers to nuance global understandings of the less than 1-month-old Lebanese civil war. Consequently, they initiated transnational empathetic processes.

The Lebanese civil war of 1958 changed when a revolution erupted in nearby Iraq, overturning the British-installed Hashemite monarchy. Lebanese anti-Chamounists rejoiced, along with Nasser's followers and many other Arab nationalists in the Middle East and North Africa. National Front leaders telegraphed their congratulations to the new regime of Abd al-Karim Qasim. The Iraqi revolution was a clear victory for those who opposed Western intervention in Middle Eastern affairs, they exclaimed. Former Lebanese prime minister Sa'ib Salam, in a telegram passed on to the global media in Beirut, declared it “a great event in the march onwards to Arab liberation.” News “of your great Arab revolution for the sake of freedom have filled with joy the hearts of the Lebanese people who are struggling for freedom.” According to *Telegraf*, foreign governments “should no longer count upon the support of princes, kings, or rulers . . . Any foreigner who has a real grasp of where his interests lie can no longer count solely on the support of the people,” it added. “He must of course first manage to win their trust . . .”²⁹

The 1958 US Intervention in Lebanon

Anti-Chamounist jubilation in the wake of the Iraqi revolution, in conjunction with the poor state of the Chamounist cause and concern over a UAR intervention, led the Lebanese president to privately request US military intervention in the Lebanese civil war of 1958. Chamoun begged Eisenhower to send US forces to Lebanon within 2 days' time, "to save it from a hostile invasion and a disastrous civil war."³⁰ Fearing a loss of international prestige, the prepared US president accepted and invoked the Eisenhower Doctrine, officially doing so to protect both "Lebanon's territorial integrity" and US citizens there. With three marine and two army battalions stationed in the Mediterranean and Germany, he secretly initiated a preplanned landing of US leathernecks "to take place the next afternoon, at 3 P.M. Lebanon time." And so, less than 24 hours after the Iraqi revolution, the US Sixth Fleet had Lebanon's shore in its sights.³¹

As roughly 2,000 US marines approached their landing site, they initially encountered very few negative Lebanese emotions. Contrary to commonly held US assumptions, both on board and back home, "the largest American troop deployment between Korea and Vietnam wars" met innocent Lebanese fanfare. Upon seeing US destroyers, Lebanese construction workers "dropped their tools" to assist debarking US leathernecks. Nearby villagers "galloped [over] on horseback." Lebanese children and their parents, as well as the elderly, rushed to greet the US marines with cheer, likely assuming that the landing marked the latest vacation stop for those stationed with the US Sixth Fleet. Vendors were not far behind, with their fully stocked red Coca-Cola iceboxes. Lebanese onlookers shouted "greetings in English and excitedly [took] pictures." Jihad Khazen, who lived in the nearby village of Hadath, remembers inviting US troops to his parents' home for coffee.³²

The beach-front scene near Khalde proved deceiving, as the Lebanese public had not yet been informed about Operation Blue Bat—Camille Chamoun would only do so via Lebanese airwaves at day's end. The Lebanese president's latest maneuver "stunned" anti-Chamounists. The Lebanese opposition, therefore, desired to make themselves heard anew. As the global "news media descended on Beirut in droves," Salam issued a series of press statements that were squashed by Chamoun's government. Lebanese censors eventually permitted Salam to release a watered-down statement that read, "The [US] landing is a flagrant violation of international behavior. We shall resist it with all the means at our disposal." This message differed greatly from a subsequent speech in Beirut's Basta neighborhood, which warned his followers: "There is a grave danger, and imperialism has returned with its armies to the beloved homeland in a hideous plot hatched with the traitor agent Camille [Chamoun] and his criminal gang."³³

Back in the USA, Americans received word about US involvement in the Lebanese civil war of 1958 a mere 20 minutes after the initial landing. Like Lebanese, Americans were stunned. Notwithstanding, congressional and popular support for Operation Blue Bat was strong. Key members of the Democratic Party, like Senate Leader Lyndon B. Johnson (D-TX), House Speaker Sam Rayburn (D-TX), and House Leader John McCormack (D-MA), quickly endorsed the US intervention.³⁴ So did “four out of every five” Americans, revealed a *Wall Street Journal* poll of roughly three hundred “office workers, policemen, housewives, corporate executives, and others” from 13 “large cities around the land.” Presidential authority sufficed for most of those Americans interviewed. According to C. E. Woolman, president of Delta Airlines, “It’s hard to tell the coach what to do when you’re up in the stands where you hardly see the game through the fog.”³⁵

The Lebanese public sphere, meanwhile, overflowed with a panoply of anxiety, dread, and indignation. *An-Nahar*, arguably Lebanon’s most popular daily at the time, and numerous other newspapers staunchly opposed Operation Blue Bat and Chamoun’s role in it, censorship and its blank spaces notwithstanding. They distrusted the US’ proclaimed motives for intervention. From their perspectives, Eisenhower sought to protect the unpopular Chamoun, not Lebanese independence or US citizens in Lebanon. Former Lebanese prime minister ‘Abdallah Yafi authored a scathing op-ed in the previously reprimanded *As-Siyassa*, labeling the US decision to accept Chamoun’s request for intervention as “The Biggest Treason!” Washington was “the leader of all democratic countries and the free world,” he regretted, “but now it has become in our eyes the ugliest picture of imperialism.” According to *Telegraf*, the US military intervention was a “flagrant aggression on Lebanon’s independence.” The sight of US boots cordoning off all entrances to Beirut International Airport and descending upon neighborhoods led it to feel that Operation Blue Bat was “occupation in the fullest sense of the word.” The US intervention was far from helpful, as far as influential *An-Nahar* editorialist Ghassan Tueini was concerned: “Foreign troops will not solve [the] Lebanese crisis.”³⁶

Lebanese wills to be heard and ensuing perspective-giving initiated uncontrollable empathetic processes between Lebanon and the USA, as a fresh round of US troops and tank landing crafts poured ashore and jet fighters patrolled Lebanese skies. Numerous Lebanese deputies and leaders released public statements that decried the US military presence. They wanted Americans to grasp the Lebanese crisis through the opposition’s point of view. Some had an easier time than others, thanks to Chamoun’s censorship. Lebanese speaker of parliament Adil Osseiran—whose initial telegram the day prior to Eisenhower, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and UN Secretary General Dag Hammarsköld had been muzzled by the government-run post office, but eventually made its way through on July 16—categorically rejected the US intervention. The Lebanese parliament had not

authorized, let alone requested, the USA to preserve “the independence and sovereignty of the Lebanese republic.” Osseiran, furthermore, regretted Washington’s modus operandi to protect US lives, given that, “After 65 days of the current dispute among the Lebanese[,] none of them ha[ve] threatened American lives or property.” His telegram demanded “the evacuation of the troops forthwith lest the good relations between the Lebanese and American peoples be harmed.”³⁷

The National Front’s Sa’ib Salam also spoke to those Americans outside the White House, “before it was too late.” In another statement passed on to the global media, Salam decried Washington’s military intervention as being misguided. The Lebanese civil war of 1958, he repeated, was “purely an internal act which bears no relation to any foreign intervention.” As such, the leader of the Basta offered a “warning to the aggressor American forces” by demanding total withdrawal “immediately from Lebanese soil in order to preserve the Lebanon’s freedom, sovereignty, and independence and to maintain world peace,” or else.³⁸

Listening Americans, in turn, engaged with the Lebanese civil war of 1958 from their own homes, workplaces, or communities. US media outlets, with their connections to an increasingly globalized information network, played a crucial role in informing US society, as well as shaping emotional/cognitive reactions. News coverage of the Lebanese civil war of 1958 facilitated varying intercultural encounters between Lebanese and Americans. Influential national newspapers, such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal*, introduced many Americans to “the most westernized country in the Middle East,” which was “only a little more than half the size of New Jersey.”³⁹

“Tiny,” “friendly” Lebanon, for which most Americans “knew little about,” became less foreign, as headlines, pictures, reporting, op-eds, and video footage from and about the land of cedars became part of their individual and collective national imaginations. Lebanese “delight,” “excitement,” and “enthusiasm” jumped off US newspaper pages following Operation Blue Bat’s first day. The front-page of the *New York Times*, in its coverage of the first round of US landings at Khalde Beach, was a case in point. There was no need to worry, intimated its special correspondent Sam Pope Brewer, as the “Beirut public received [US leath-er-necks] like a circus coming to town.” Universal Studios’ *Universal International News*, which ran in theatres prior to the start of featured movies, trumpeted Operation Blue Bat’s first day of activity, but rendered it “one of the strangest operations of its kind.” Devoid of anticipated hostility, images of peaceful Lebanese male onlookers, including a popsicle-eating teenager, smiling, clapping, and cheering, filled big screens across the USA.⁴⁰

Joy notwithstanding, Lebanese opposition to Operation Blue Bat found its way into the US public sphere. The National Front’s representational interventions, likely “serve[d] up” to Beirut-based foreign correspondents with “some syrupy

Turkish coffee and some cakes that were probably baked that morning in the government controlled part of town,” counteracted incomplete, oversimplified US images of Lebanese glee.⁴¹ Salam’s July 15 press statement that decried the arrival of US troops in Lebanon was picked up by the AP and UPI news services, as well as printed in the following day’s *New York Times*, albeit on page 12. The Basta *za’im*’s agitation found its way onto the front page of the *Washington Post*, which quoted him as saying that Operation Blue Bat “puts an end to the legend of democracy.” Washington, it read, forever tarnished “its claim of faithfulness to the United Nations Charter and has failed to respect the principles of freedom of peoples to decide their own fate.”⁴²

Empathy and The Formation of Transnational Dissent

The empathetic dispositions of Americans varied. Timings, contexts, personalities, experiences, cultures, and memories mattered to affective foreign relations.⁴³ In many instances, US feelings and perspectives pointed elsewhere than Lebanon. Geographic separation, cultural prejudices, nationalist myths of exceptionalism, and/or the authority of the Oval Office compelled significant parts of US society to set its sights and touch near-at-hand, far away from the land of cedars. Myriad barriers trumped US intentions to empathize with many Lebanese.⁴⁴ Yet empathy still structured a curious relationship between Lebanese anti-Chamounists and a decentered group of perspective-taking Americans. Emotionally speaking, Lebanese opposition both informed and complimented US skepticism vis-à-vis the military intervention.

A Lebanese–US emotional rapprochement required US wills to listen and be moved by anti-Chamounist points of view. The *Wall Street Journal* led the charge at first, pointing Americans toward an empathetic path by adopting the National Front’s perspective regarding the root cause of the civil war. Far from deceiving Lebanese or cajoling Americans, the mainstream US newspaper stressed and, in turn, incorporated Lebanese anti-Chamounist thinking/feeling into its own political reflections. The *Wall Street Journal* was empathetic, in this case, because it felt that what Lebanese thought and how they felt about Operation Blue Bat mattered to US credibility and prestige in the Arab world. “[I]n no sense is this a battle against Communism” or its purported Arab Middle Eastern disciples, it opined. Instead, “What we are struggling against in the Middle East is a rising tide of people’s deep emotions.” Lebanese perspectives, it intimated, needed to be understood and shared to avoid exacerbating US–Middle East relations. A US *weltanschauung* that omitted empathy with the Lebanese opposition, cautioned the *Wall Street Journal*, “would turn the Arabs’ resentment ‘into hatred for America.’” And that was not good for the US’ global Cold War.⁴⁵

A first wave of Lebanese emotions and perspectives (in)formed listening Americans, leading some to immediately question the US' place in the world as a policeman. The National Front's opposition to Operation Blue Bat, as expressed by Osseiran, Salam, and other leading anti-Chamounists, was integrated into a reflectional process whereby some Americans unearthed disturbing linkages between it and the not-too distant British–French intervention in the Suez crisis of 1956–57. Many Lebanese, of course, were doing the same; Washington, a piece in *al-Hayat* deduced, was “now fighting to get its own way.”⁴⁶ This “tragic irony” struck US nerves: was the USA being imperial in Lebanon, like its Cold War allies Britain and France had been in Egypt 2 years prior? An unhappy Senator Humphrey was afraid so: “we could make no greater mistake than to have the United States become the policeman of the world . . . our actions and policies cast us in a historic pattern of the British and the French, who themselves finally failed in the Middle East.”⁴⁷

Lebanese wills to be heard and US wills to listen coalesced, opening empathetic pathways between the National Front and the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee. An influential group of US senatorial committee members that had been skeptical of the Eisenhower Doctrine when passed by Congress in early 1957 started to put themselves in Lebanese shoes, empathizing with key members of the Lebanese opposition. Lebanese popular distrust of both Chamoun and the Eisenhower administration weighed heavily on their reluctance to back Operation Blue Bat. Leading US senators included Lebanese anti-Chamounist perspectives in their reasonings in honest and, at times, complimentary ways. Humphrey cited verbatim Osseiran's distraught telegram to US officials, which finally found its way to its US recipients. Whereas his own opposition to Operation Blue Bat came from a different direction than his Lebanese counterpart, Humphrey's invocation of Osseiran's telegram evidenced the important place that empathy played within his stance, during this particular time and instance. Humphrey clearly found Lebanese feeling/thinking worrisome. Henceforth, his actions regarding the US intervention in Lebanon neither contradicted, nor jeopardized his verbal opposition. Senator William Fulbright (D-AR) concurred, especially when “you get people like the [Lebanese] Speaker of the House telling us to get out.” After contemplating Lebanese oppositions, Senator Wayne Morse (D-OR) also deduced that the US intervention in the Lebanese civil war of 1958 was “a tragic historic mistake.” Feeling with the Lebanese opposition, the Oregon senator avowed, “I think the people of Lebanon have a right to determine what their form of government is,” without US interference.⁴⁸ Until Operation Blue Bat's end, Humphrey, Fulbright, and Morse, amid others, firmly stood against Eisenhower's intervention, alongside Lebanese anti-Chamounists like Osseiran.⁴⁹

Burgeoning empathetic processes caused listening Americans to follow Lebanese anti-Chamounist footsteps and introspectively ask themselves if the USA

was behaving in an imperial way. The Lebanese public sphere overflowed with such accusations, some of which gradually found their way into the US press. Leading Lebanese dailies denounced the USA as an imperial power. A consensus of sorts emerged amid anti-Chamounist outlets: with the arrival of US troops, the Lebanese civil war of 1958 transformed into a postcolonial struggle of decolonization in the world. Chamoun and Eisenhower's Operation Blue Bat marked imperialism's return; "Lebanon will not be a colonized country," read a headline in *As-Siyassa*, "nor will it be a passage for imperialism." Lebanese opposition commonly likened the US military presence to the imperial era of the French mandate. Calls for a "new independence" grew, as a result. Lebanese commentators, like *An-Nahar*'s Michel Abou Jaoude, even intimidated that, contrary to its so-called anti-imperial tradition, the US government wanted Chamoun to request its intervention: "it is quite clear that Beirut's calls would have never reached Washington's ears if Washington didn't intend on hearing them in the first place." According to the renowned Lebanese public intellectual Suhail Idris, Operation Blue Bat revealed that the USA "has become today the biggest imperial country in the world."⁵⁰

Transnational dissent toward Operation Blue Bat developed from US soul-searching, hand-in-hand with Lebanese perspective-giving and the ensuing initiation of empathetic processes. Whereas many Americans belittled Lebanese postcolonial critiques as "delirious nonsense," others questioned why Lebanese anti-Chamounists decried "American imperialism" and, in turn, identified the amorality of US foreign policy.⁵¹ According to the *Wall Street Journal*, "the United States can try, and there are those who say it should, to put on the mantle of imperialism which the British and French laid down." It, however, did not; "we had best recognize that we will have done something alien to our ways and accepted a very grievous burden." Olive La Guardia, a concerned US citizen, relayed her "deep sense of dismay" in a letter to the *New York Times*. "Charges of imperialism," in the case of Lebanon, would plague both Americans and US foreign relations. Pasadena, California's J. Stuart Innerst also put pen to paper, avowing that "The role of global policeman ill becomes the United States. It links us with the old imperialism which stands discredited and rejected by the emergent nations of Asia and Africa."⁵²

US experiences with Lebanese thinking/feeling, in some cases, had the effect of relaxing Orientalist prejudices and sharpened nascent critiques of the Eisenhower Doctrine, US–Middle East relations, as well as the USA in the world. Imperialism, empathetic citizens determined, did not perceive or treat other peoples as equals; it was antithetical to the morality of self-determination and thus the invented tradition of US anti-imperialism. For the USA to shed the imperial label, it needed to ease Lebanese decolonial efforts. The Eisenhower Doctrine, which vowed to protect the Middle East from international communism,⁵³ and Operation Blue Bat

failed to do this as they went against Lebanese popular will. Fay Reisfelt, in a letter to her California Congressman John Baldwin, asked, “Are we only in favor of self-determination when we agree with its results?” “Who are we to deny them” that right, appealed the *Christian Century*. H. Mertz Jr., for his part, opined in the *Washington Post*: “It sometimes happens that revolution is good for a people: Read Tom Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence,” he contended. “But it is not for us to judge. Let the Arabs decide their own fate.”⁵⁴

Reports of insurmountable Lebanese objections to the US intervention from within the democratically elected Chamber of Deputies surfaced in the US public sphere, further opening US eyes to Lebanese predicaments. The *New York Times* published an AP story, entitled, “Only 26 Held for Chamoun.” According to Lebanese deputy Emile Bustani, who was described as a “pro-Western member of the Foreign Affairs Committee,” a little over one-third of elected members of the Lebanese parliament “supported President Chamoun’s decision to call on the United States for help.” In his front-page column in the same newspaper, Sam Pope Brewer passed on that Osseiran and ““about thirty members’ out of a total sixty-six” signed off on a telegram destined for the UN Security Council, which criticized the US landings. As far as Brewer could tell in Beirut, “The United States forces are not being received with great joy after the first show of enthusiasm.”⁵⁵

The authority of Lebanon’s Chamber of Deputies, in some cases, imprinted listening Americans, like J. Paul Cotton of Geneva, Ohio. Upon reading about the Osseiran-led parliamentary protest, Cotton penned a disgruntled letter to the *New York Times*. “Even the pro-Western members of the Parliament of Lebanon see the coming of the marines as a tragic mistake,” he complained. Chicago’s Joan Beidler agreed. In a personal letter addressed to the US president, Beidler shared her “emotions.” In her opinion, the fact that most Lebanese deputies opposed the US intervention proved bothersome. “In school,” she wrote, “I learned that the American Government is By the people, Of the people and FOR the people—the sum of the individuals who make up our political society.” Was this also not the case in Lebanon? Chamoun, as Osseiran and other Lebanese anti-Chamounists made clear, did not represent the Lebanese parliament.⁵⁶

Empathetic processes deepened a dissident strain within the constellation of US public opinion, even as Congress officially approved the US intervention in the Lebanese civil war of 1958.⁵⁷ A “clash of opinions” ensued, leading some US commentators to invoke empathy metaphors when explaining their own opposition to Operation Blue Bat and expressing solidarity with Lebanese anti-Chamounists. According to *The Nation*’s Edwin Wakin, “our failure to look at things from the Middle East point of view” endangered US credibility in the world and imagined liberal tenants of US national identity. Most Lebanese, not to mention their elected representatives, did not support the Eisenhower Doctrine or the Chamoun regime,

which said something regarding Washington's orientation. The *New York Times*'s C. L. Sulzberger agreed. "Confusion" ran wild, as a result.⁵⁸

Lebanese "unhappiness" seemed definitive in US imaginations. The "Lebanese mood" was headline news. A transmission of affect, from Lebanese to Americans, was in full force. Americans heard/felt Lebanese anti-Chamounist thinking/feeling, including those students at the American University of Beirut who were yelling, "'Yankees, go home!' as three trucks roll[ed] by with US Marines." Sitting on the fender of his aging Chrysler taxi, Trofik Denaiw shared his feeling that, "Americans are very good—but not as soldiers in Lebanon." When asked by an AP reporter why she fought with Salam's anti-Chamounist forces in the Basta, a "deadly serious," teenage Samira Sunno answered, "Because (President Camille) Chamoun is unjust to the Lebanese people and because he is an aggressor. . . . So are you Americans," she exclaimed. "What are you doing in Lebanon supporting an unjust man?"⁵⁹ Surely, empathizing Americans that encountered Sunno in the *Washington Post* wondered the same thing and pondered its consequences on US prestige at home, in the Arab world, and around the globe.

Americans, through this transmission of affect, increasingly empathized with Lebanese anti-Chamounists by reproducing their thinking/feeling in print. For instance, Brewer's regular *New York Times* column relayed some of the opinions offered by the anti-Chamounist *An-Nahar*. The "moderate" Lebanese daily, he reported, commented that, "The delicate position of American forces in Lebanon is about to turn into a problem in itself." Brewer then drew his own conclusion that, "There are already indications in the press and personal comment that the United States will get little thanks for this operation." Overwhelming Lebanese calls for US withdrawal engendered empathizing Americans to follow suit. The view from Beirut was clear and it was shared by the *Wall Street Journal*: Operation Blue Bat "has not only deepened the rift between the rebels and the Chamoun government, it has actually split the pro-Western factions down the middle."⁶⁰

The Lebanese Chamber of Deputies crossed the election hurdle on July 31, electing Army General Fu'ad Shihab to the Lebanese presidency. For Lebanese and Americans alike, regime change gave "rise to the hope that the end of the civil war in Lebanon . . . was at last in sight."⁶¹ Lebanese anti-Chamounists, for their part, held back as they awaited deeds, not words. Americans easily gained this impression upon experiencing a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, or MGM, *News of the Day* interview with Chouf za'im Kemal Jumblatt, who called upon the global media following Shihab's election. Following a panoramic view of the Lebanese mountain range, passing by "rebels with guns," the "forty-year-old revolutionary, lawyer, and philosopher" calmly answered questions in English, with a thick foreign accent. When asked if his followers were prepared to defend themselves against Lebanese intruders, the suit- and tie-wearing Jumblatt answered: "Why

not. We don't want evidently to sacrifice people and to let Lebanese fight against Lebanese, but if some truthful aim is there and will oblige us to fight, we shall fight." *Universal International News*, for its part, showed footage of the MGM reporter interviewing Jumblatt, albeit dubbed over by its narrator reporting on the general reaction of the "rebel opposition" and its potential impact on US withdrawal. The face of the Lebanese anti-Chamounist leader appeared serious, but not menacing. "The world can only hope that rebel leaders like this one," read the narrator, "will be satisfied with the departure of President Camille Chamoun, number one target of the rebels."⁶²

A minority trend within US public opinion, in response to ongoing Lebanese calls for actions, drafted the Eisenhower Doctrine's obituary, even with the US president's approval ratings being as high as 58%.⁶³ Powered in part by empathy, its opposition did not wane. US "troops must come out," opined the editors of *The Nation*. "And for a change, let us begin to think of the problems of the Middle East not exclusively in term of [national security], but also in terms of what is best for Arabs." Americans, in other words, should put themselves in Lebanese shoes.⁶⁴

The Lebanese shoe fit some Americans. African Americans, having a common experience of prejudice and discrimination with peoples of the Middle East, proved empathetic. Washington and its European-descended leaders had not learned the lesson of imperialism, lamented *Pittsburgh Courier* editorialist P.L. Prattis. A racialized thinking structure that Edward Said later coined as Orientalism,⁶⁵ which belied the feelings and opinions of Arabs, as well as sanctioned military intervention, blinded their eyes and darkened their hearts. "Our white folk, who think they are so superior, pretend they cannot get at what is on the Arab mind. Unable or unwilling to understand, they resort to making silly," belittling "charges." Prattis, like Lebanese anti-Chamounists, had had enough. Affective self-containment resulted in "[o]ur white folk (Mr. Dulles and others) hav[ing] ignored the pleas of the Arab masses." Lebanese anti-Chamounists, some of whom Prattis claimed to personally know, wanted universal equality and human dignity. The best way "[t]he United States could help" was "if it used its heart instead of resorting to its pocketbooks to shore up unwanted regimes." *The New Republic* agreed, asserting: "A change of attitude would allow us to take seriously the ambitions of Arab nationalists to run their own affairs."⁶⁶ US empathy was lacking in its foreign relations with Lebanon, as well as the broader Arab world.

Back in Lebanon, warring factions agreed upon a truce and the Chamber of Deputies submitted its resignation to the out-going Chamoun. Shihab, in a subsequent national address, proclaimed that the presence of US troops in Lebanon was a threat to "national unity." The Lebanese president-elect publicly requested US withdrawal. Lebanese and Americans alike, at this point, eagerly awaited US forces to exit "Lebanon's weird war."⁶⁷ A mere month after entering Lebanon, a

first battalion of 1,800 marines departed on August 13, 1958 “to the rustle of ‘Yankee Go Home’ leaflets.”⁶⁸ Lebanese factions, meanwhile, negotiated an end to their civil war, as evidenced by “the rumble and clatter of hundred or iron’s shutters being rolled up in Beirut shops” following the National Front’s lifting of the almost three-month-long general strike.⁶⁹

US empathizers, for their part, reflected upon Eisenhower’s perceived irrational mistake. Many found the US presence to be “embarrassing.” “With a little more understanding of the Arab psychology,” read an article in the *Washington Post*, “we can still ensure that [Arabs] will be friendly to the West . . . But not a minute can be wasted and there must be no more mistakes.” Empathy, the same paper determined a few weeks later upon additional reflection, “was the quality most often lacking in American foreign policy pronouncements.” A better understanding of how “others see us” was imperative to US credibility in the world.⁷⁰

By October’s end, “without any fanfare” this time around, the last of US troops “packed up,” gave Beirut a “last look,” and left town.⁷¹ Lebanon, devoid of US troops, “was at peace for the first time since” Matni’s assassination. *An-Nahar*’s Ghassan Tueini perhaps best summed up how Lebanese society felt: the US intervention in the Lebanese civil war of 1958 “was a mistake! It was a huge political mistake!” The *Wall Street Journal*, once again, shared the popular Lebanese perspective and avowed: “the United States appeared to act without due reflection.”⁷² Americans, including Eisenhower, were emotional, just like Lebanese anti-Chamounists. And some shared what Lebanese felt and thought, forming a common cause against the US intervention in the Lebanese civil war of 1958.

Conclusion

As the crisis of 1958 ended, US empathies for Lebanese people came and went. Emotions do that. Lebanese, like Eid Dib, were no longer in the minds and bodies of US imaginations, and vice versa. Yet, despite passing-by, empathy and its varying emotional processes permitted a group of Americans to grasp the sudden US intervention in the Lebanese civil war of 1958 and, rather quickly, denounce its shaky foundations. Empathy, *au verso*, served as a peaceful, spontaneous route by which Lebanese anti-Chamounists shared their opposition with Americans and intervened in the US public sphere. Such empathetic connections remained strong until the US withdrawal was complete. In unforeseen ways, empathetic processes brought distant persons together to engender political change via transmissions of affect.

Empathy and its emotional forces, temporarily in some cases, more permanently in others, structured a curious relationship that bridged perceived differences between members of Lebanese and US societies. Instinctive, Lebanese cultural interventions brought down US walls of affective self-containment. They allowed

listening Americans to not only acknowledge Lebanese negative emotions, but also better understand why Lebanese felt the ways they did and how such Lebanese emotives impacted Americans and the USA in the world. Some Americans, notwithstanding a majority US support for Operation Blue Bat, reasoned with Lebanese anti-Chamounists against Eisenhower's sanctioned military intervention in "tiny," "friendly" Lebanon by questioning Operation Blue Bat's credibility. These Americans, as evidenced by their staunch support for the Lebanese opposition and its call for US withdrawal until fully accomplished, were not using empathy to cajole or deceive anyone; rather, empathy was integral to their thinking/feeling.

Through empathy and its moving parts, Lebanese and Americans formed a common goal. Empathizing Americans opposed the US intervention, in part, because of what a majority of Lebanese thought and how they felt. Emotionally charged, a group of Americans felt and thought that Lebanese popular distrust jeopardized US prestige in the world, which in turn was integral in framing US opposition to both Operation Blue Bat and the Eisenhower Doctrine that sanctioned it. Together, via empathetic processes, US and Lebanese peoples uncoincidentally shared the sentiment that the "102-day operation" was a tragic mistake, even if they had different political reasons to do so. The emotion of empathy, in this case, produced genuine human connections that facilitated the formation of transnational dissent.⁷³

Empathy was—and is—ubiquitous in global affairs. Despite only recently being scientifically discovered, it has been simultaneously at the core of foreign relations and in the conflicting hearts of foreign encounters. Like self-interest and national security doctrines, empathy was central to the emotional/cognitive processes by which, in the summer of 1958, a decentered band of Americans understood, humanized, and connected with Lebanese anti-Chamounists. Clashes of opinions, hand-in-hand with the emotions that power them, set disparate individuals and their communities apart; *but they also bring them together*, beyond prejudices, both within and beyond the geographical and cultural borders of nation-states, at unforeseen times and in scientifically inexplicable ways.

How cultural divisions are constructed and maintained in myriad imaginations is tragically common historical, historiographical, and human currency. Foreign perceptions and experiences are, likewise, a hallmark of foreign relations history, thanks in part to empathetic readings—or reading with empathy. Readings for empathy, its emotional processes, and the formations of intercultural connections have been neglected, however. Sadly, both the USA and the Arab world are no exceptions. An emotional turn, with empathy as a key stimulant, is fundamental to understanding how intercultural understandings are formed, cultivating genuine intercultural understanding itself, and finalizing a constructive, equitable re-orientation of Arab–US relations and global affairs more broadly. Such an intervention is worth fighting for.

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